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NEW ENGLAND GARDENS

BY MARTHA BROOKES HUTCHESON

THE New England garden lives in our minds, more or less, as a picturesque ideal. There is hardly anyone of American tradition, who has known New England, who has not a definite impression of the gardens of its old type. Those which are still unhurt are to be found throughout New England, but they are rare, and their escape from the ravages of new owners, the tastes of new generations or real estate changes, is almost miraculous.

The average home of the old days was on a rural village or town street, so the problems to be met in the making of the gardens were of a nature to conform to this condition. Therefore, it is on this type of garden that I shall dwell first, as it is the true type of what might be termed the New England garden of the past.

These were always, more or less, secluded. They often lay at the back of the house, or, if by the road, they were fenced or hedged in, and although not absolutely cut off from the passer-by, they were distinctly a place apart from the highway outside. One must have felt, in passing by, a sense of that which lay beyond the fence or hedges, and the glimpses of the color here and there were but a temptation to enter and see much more. The gardens were like an outside part of the house itself, where the uninvited stranger had no more right to trespass than he would have had to enter the house.

The importance of this garden space was taken as a matter of course by almost all well-to-do people. The necessity for it was easily and unostentatiously met. The interest felt by the old-time New England woman was so keen that she was much like her kinswoman in England in her love of flowers and her enthusiasm in taking active interest in them. There were few gardens which were very elaborate in the sense of the term we now use, but there was a garden belonging to

almost every home, sometimes less beautiful than the next, naturally, but it was a garden, and it held the fundamental requirements of outdoor pleasures. The human interest and intent of purpose which made them, was allied in beauty to the busy humming-bird that visited their flowers. In those days, when life was simple and repose was not the rarest of moods, there was time not only for work, but for rest, in these gay spots, with their rose arches and small fruit trees, their flower borders and shady corners, as well as fine glowing spaces of summer bloom. The late afternoon light fell with infinite charm on the flowers and pathways, and from beneath large spreading quince trees, or the arbor of honeysuckle and trumpet vine, those bygone people looked upon the lovely space so full of restfulness, privacy and charm, and felt a refreshment of mind which we of this generation seldom realize. Groups of friends could sit and talk; children could play about and weave their worlds of imagination about the mysteries of forms and colors, and the garden, in its constantly changing loveliness, bloomed on.

I can never forget the description that a Rhode Island woman once gave me of her grandmother playing her harp on summer days in a box-bordered garden under a large cherry tree. It seemed to me the truest expression of the real intimacy between the garden and its owner; the proof of what one can get out of it in one's daily life; the intimate connection in the mind of the house and its outside room, its garden.

But the pendulum of change had to swing, and, unfortunately, it was influenced in a way that brought such almost universal destruction to the old gardens that today we find one where there were hundreds. Practically every hedge, every fence, has disappeared; the flower borders and the plum trees and quinces have gone too, and a lawn with a few nur-



A FORMAL STREET IN A NEW ENGLAND TOWN WHICH HAS BEEN MADE BEAUTIFUL

seryman's shrubs has taken their places. Woe to the day that a so-called "village improvement" spirit swept over so many of our New England towns! Why it found so blind yet responsive a com-

munity, ready to adopt its bad advice, will never be understood. It spoiled more lovely New England spots than any of us can imagine, and, worst of all, it set a hideous and stupid example of

treatment which will take the effort of decades to undo. It also taught the lack of privacy. One's place was thrown open to the roadway or the passer-by, and the owners were under the impression that they were thoroughly up with the times.

In the era of black walnut furniture those who discarded their beautiful things for the hopelessly new and hideous thought also that they were pre-eminently up-to-date. Fortunately, that new furniture, by this time, has found its way through auction rooms into boarding-houses or wood-piles, but, alas, the high arbor-vitæ hedges and box-borders and high roses which had taken years and years to establish could not be brought back as, fortunately, most of the old furniture could. The hedges are gone, and those who realize the devastation weep over it. Our secluded charming privacy of the old New England spirit, which was akin to that which still exists in all other civilized countries, gave place to the American vulgarity and lack of esthetic or dramatic sense which make the publicity of our "piazza life" so possible.

In abandoning all the seclusion of their outdoor life to the observation of the stranger, the argument was "that the main street was made so much more interesting if all the barriers between it and the houses were taken away—the expanse on both sides lent so much greater breadth to the street and gave the town a more prosperous look."

No one sprang up to contradict these assertions, and the knowledge of town planning was at a low ebb; consequently this mysterious influence seemed to take possession of all individuality of mind, and with but a few exceptions the fences and hedges fell under the axe, and the new era of our New England highway began. We all know it now; the outcome of colossal ignorance and lack of good taste.

The new fashion, as we might call it, was two-fold in its devastation. It robbed the home not only of its garden but of its privacy, and it robbed the highway of its most valuable line of margin and perspective. The only thing

that makes a formal street beautiful is its symmetry and perspective. The trees on its margin are beautiful not only as single trees but because of the long, diminishing line in the distance, which is produced by their being planted each side of the road and at equal distances from the road, and from each other. Then comes another valuable converging line—that of the green turf beneath the trees, and still another is found in the sidewalk, and another line in the grass sometimes left between the sidewalk and the property line. Now, if this property line is not marked, and if what should make the final enclosure or frame to the street scheme has been taken away, the whole formality of the margin of the street, from an esthetic standpoint, has been lost.

From an aspect of safety alone there is reason enough for having fences or hedges. To have no barrier between children playing on their home lawn and a possible runaway horse proves that the "eternal sense of fitness" has been sorely overlooked.

So in three ways this "village improvement" worked for ill. It robbed homes of their privacy and also of their safety, and robbed the street of an important factor in its esthetic beauty. Though the argument toward making these changes was that the town might be beautified by the unbroken view of each man's lawn, the sense of altruism seldom seemed to reach the point where the fence lying between the different places was done away with. An owner was glad enough to have the town look at his property from the street, but had no idea of having anyone think that any of his land was owned by his neighbor. Therefore, we have those meaningless fences that run between houses and stop at the street line, an incongruous disfigurement which owners do not seem to have the taste nor the humor to see. All this applies to what happened in our rural cities and towns thirty or forty years ago in the mistaken effort to improve them.

Then came another change. A few years ago, a glaring, flatly planted, open space, laid out with more or less formal-

ity, which had a fountain in the center and some stone benches on the paths, was called a garden. It had none of the essentials of a garden apart from being a place in which flowers were grown; but, inadequate as it was, it marked the

that it can make the architectural as well as the living scheme complete. We find a greater combination of informality of planting with architectural formality of treatment. The charm of the shaded corner and higher growth, with small



AN OLD TIME GARDEN PATH IN SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

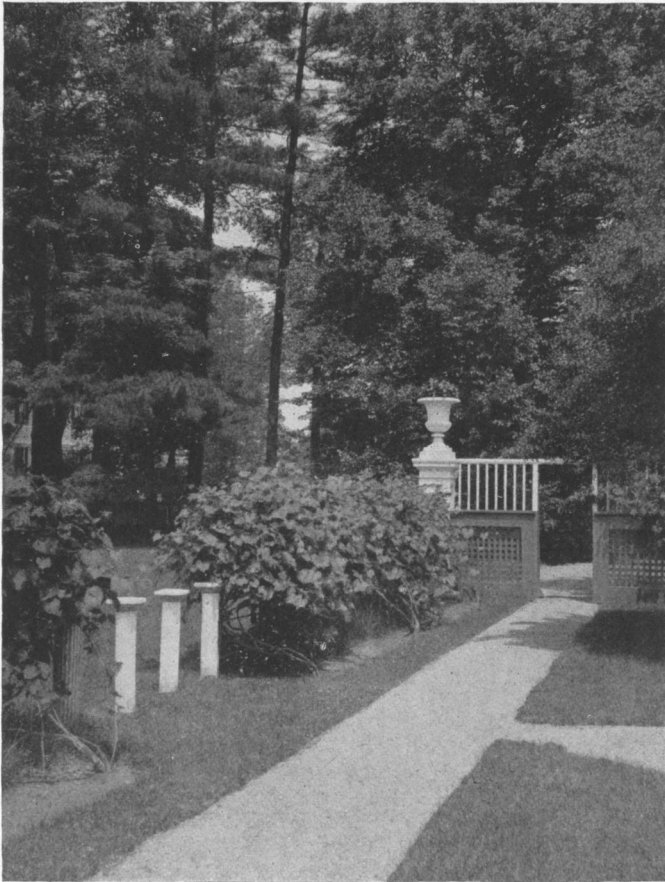
dawn of a new era. Today people of education and taste are making gardens which are, in some rare instances, worthy of comparison with the fine gardens of Europe. The inspiration has come through the gardens of the Old World, and their adaptation to the requirements here has, in some cases, been wonderful. We are beginning to again demand as a necessity a garden which can be lived in, and, in addition, we have learned

trees in the foreground, is beginning to be looked for as a necessity, combined with the architectural basis of design and proportion. People are finding out that the colors of the flowers or the detail of the balustrade look more inviting if they have the contrast of light and shade in the surrounding growth. If you do not believe this, go and stand in the center of a garden which is of the open, flat type of fifteen or twenty

years ago, full of masses of splendid color, but with no high planting, and no shadows. Do this when the light is very strong. Then go to some spot very near where there is a low-branched tree and stand behind it, so that the tree is brought between you and the garden as

three words, *color, shadow and privacy*, as their guiding stars toward success, we would again have charming villages and restful gardens with civilized dignity.

We have, through becoming a people of wealth and leisure, had time to look back and see not only our own mistakes



AN OLD PLACE POSSESSING THE CHARM OF "SHADOW AND PRIVACY"

a large note in the foreground, and notice your garden's color again. Not only do you see far more of the beauty of color and flowers, but the place has suddenly taken on an effective and restful value which it did not have before, and you feel the impulse to sit down under that shade and enjoy it. If only makers of gardens and small home places would use

in what we ruthlessly destroyed but the fine examples of Europe, of which we had been either ignorant or blind. The development of the art there had been in practice since the Renaissance, and the simple examples of gardens of all classes were found everywhere. We travel today and our eyes are opened—but do we see only the splendid Italian

villas or the gardens of British fame? No, we see as well the English villages, and we envy England her possession of flowered and homelike dooryards. We talk of them! We photograph them!! And we sigh about them!!! That is, we who can travel and see them, and when

beauty or good taste; they have not gone beyond the stage of neatness; they are almost never beautiful.

The elaborate garden belongs to the elaborate place; the equally important though simple garden or dooryard enclosure needs even more attention. The



A RESTORED NEW ENGLAND GARDEN

we come home we change or enlarge our own garden. But is this enough? We do practically nothing to help those whose small homes can make or mar the town through which we drive every morning to our train. They stand year after year naked and sordid. If they are well kept up, there is no inspiration behind the effort guided by a knowledge of real

owners of these small holdings do not realize how the same three requisites, *color, shadow and privacy*, would change our towns into places of charm and attraction as the magic wand of the fairy godmother brought Cinderella from her scene of ashes to her ballroom loveliness. It is so simple if we could only make it felt. It lacks nothing but vision. The

making would be a pleasant pastime to the owners, a needed avocation, and American towns and places could win the reputation which now belongs to England, and be a scene of unceasing beauty for us all. We who have so much of Nature's generous and exquisite planting are so callous to the sordid ugliness of our home settings. It is pitiable; it is stupid; it is without excuse in a people in whose blood is the relationship of those who do know the value of high roses, hedges and hawthorn, and who know how simple it is to have them.

Let New England wake up and set an example, taking as her guide all the sense of poetry and beauty that belongs to the tradition of her old-time gardens, and apply them to her homes of today, whether they are of the simplest type on a village street, or country places of thousands of acres. Since the former is the more important of the two, everyone owning an eighth of an acre should feel that to beautify it is expected of him.

If a man can own a house, he surely can afford a hedge between it and the street, some flowers in his dooryard, vines on the porch and shade trees. If he has space enough to give a plot to the garden, so much the better. He can have his grapes on arbors, his clothes reels surrounded by lilac hedges, a bathing pool of water for the birds, his quince and pear trees to give shade as well as fruit, and his paths broad enough to walk in comfortably with another person; he can have room to really live out in his garden in his leisure moments. And so it goes, the more space, the more labor, but the relative beauty is not always in proportion to elaboration.

The question might better be asked "Is it livable?" than "Is it elaborate?" If it is livable the note of perfection has been sounded, and, once the tune is learned, a whole orchestra of harmony will belong to our towns, and we will be a people showing signs of greater civilization than at present.

FORMAL GARDENS

BY CHARLES DOWNING LAY

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THE designing and building of gardens is, in spite of numerous Colonial examples, a late development in this country. They are increasing with great rapidity and are a manifestation of our advancing culture, of more ease and of a greater desire to provide pleasant surroundings for our life. It is hard not to quote in full Bacon's saying about "men learn to build stately sooner than to garden finely," but I refrain, though nothing more pleasing to the lover of gardens has ever been written.

It is easily understood, however, that having built and finished a stately mansion, the owner will be forced by the culture acquired in the highly educational process of building to think about the

embellishment of his grounds. Some people, of course, have become educated in accidental ways before undertaking to build a mansion, and these, of course, employ a landscape architect first to study the site of the proposed house and to determine in advance if it be suitable for such elaboration as they desire.

It is not enough to see one's personality reflected in the house and its furnishings; one must project it further, so that looking out of the windows one shall see the same cultivated feeling differently expressed. The architects have felt this, and those of European taste and training have felt the necessity of providing not only this outlook on cultivated surroundings from the rooms, but of pro-